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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet presents answers to the most frequently asked questions about the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). They include questions about the history of MEAP, its costs, subject coverage, test validity, the type of tests, administration of the tests, and use of MEAP results. (BW)

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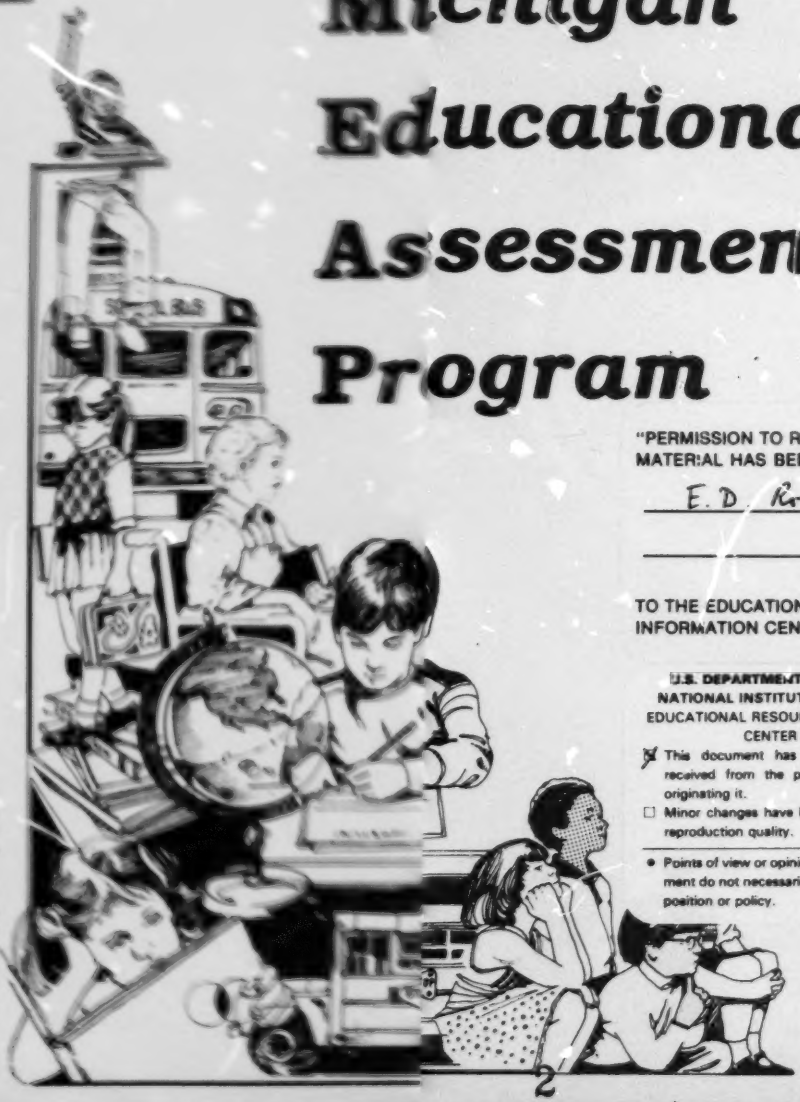
questions and answers about the Michigan Educational Assessment Program



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FOREWORD

Since its beginnings in 1969, the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) has been providing needed information about the state's schools and students to decision-makers at all levels, from the individual parent to the state legislator. As awareness of the Program has increased, more and more people have contacted the Department of Education or State Board of Education seeking further information about the MEAP.

This pamphlet, which presents answers to the most frequently asked questions about the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, is intended to inform people about the Program.

Requests for further information may be directed to the Supervisor, Michigan Educational Assessment Program, Michigan Department of Education, Box 30008, Lansing, Michigan 48909.

Phillip E. Runkel
Superintendent of
Public Instruction

July, 1983

WHAT IS MEAP?

• WHAT IS THE MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM?

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) is an effort to provide information about student achievement in all of Michigan's public schools. Simply stated, the state assessment program (MEAP) provides information to answer the question, "How are our students doing compared to what we want them to know and do?" To answer the question, statewide tests are given every fall.

• WHAT IS THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS FOR MEAP?

In Michigan, education is the constitutional responsibility of the state government. Thus, MEAP is based on the idea that the State Board of Education has a responsibility to take stock, periodically, of the educational health of Michigan students. The State Board of Education, Governor, and Legislature require this information for policy and resource allocation decisions.

In addition, when the information obtained from the MEAP "check-up" shows that students do not have certain basic skills, then appropriate instructional programs can be used by local school staff with individual students or groups of students to help them learn those basic skills.

• WHY DID MEAP BEGIN?

Prior to 1969, there was no consistent, reliable information available on the extent to which students in each local school district were learning basic skills. The state assessment program was begun to help fill this information void.

• WHEN WERE THE TESTS FIRST GIVEN?

The first MEAP tests were given in reading and mathematics in the 1969-70 school year. However, objective-referenced tests were first used in the 1973-74 school year. After some improvements for 1974-75, essentially the same objectives and tests were used each year through the 1979-80 school year.

Following a four-year development, try-out, and revision process, new objectives and tests were introduced in 1980-81 and continue to be used. Although fourth and seventh grade students have been tested since the start of the program, tenth grade students have been tested on a statewide basis only since 1979-80. More details about the history of MEAP and the development of the tests are available from MEAP.

• HOW MUCH DOES MEAP COST?

The statewide testing of every fourth, seventh, and tenth grade student cost about $.89 per pupil in 1982-83. This cost includes printing, distributing, scoring, and reporting of tests for all three grades.

MEAP is funded by state revenues at a total cost of $750,000 (including test development), which is reasonable compared to the cost of alternative commercial tests and the total amount Michigan spends on education annually.

WHAT IS TESTED?

- **WHAT SUBJECTS ARE TESTED?**

Every-pupil testing is done statewide in reading and mathematics each year. In addition, small samples of school districts are selected each year for testing in one or two subject areas other than reading

- **WHY DOES MEAP EMPHASIZE READING AND MATHEMATICS?**

Reading and mathematics are emphasized because they are basic learning areas. The State Board of Education believes that student success in these two areas is absolutely necessary.

The sample testing effort in subject areas other than reading and mathematics shows the interest and commitment of the State Board of Education to broader areas of student achievement. However, concerns about the amount of classroom time used for state tests and financial constraints limit the amount of testing which can be done.

• ARE THE MEAP TESTS VALID?

Yes. The MEAP tests are based on the performance objectives developed by many Michigan educators to include the important basic skills that most students should know and be able to do. The test questions have been written to measure the performance objectives as accurately as possible.

Several review and revision cycles involving mathematics and reading specialists were an important part of the development of the MEAP tests. In addition, following the first use of new tests on a statewide basis, other reading and mathematics specialists from the Michigan Reading Association and the Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics review the MEAP tests and results to help insure the validity of the tests and the objectives.

• ARE THE MEAP TESTS APPROPRIATE FOR ALL STUDENTS?

Yes. The MEAP staff worked very closely with teachers, principals, and reading and mathematics specialists to assure, not only that the tests measure important skills using acceptable procedures, but also that the test questions could be read and understood by most students who would take the tests.

The MEAP test questions were developed and tried out in districts which have children from various racial, ethnic, and/or socio-economic backgrounds in an effort to make the tests "culture fair." The purpose of the MEAP tests is to distinguish between those students who have attained certain reading and mathematics skills and those who have not, regardless of socio-economic status, race, nationality, or geographic area.

• WHAT ARE THE MEAP TESTS BASED ON?

The basis for the MEAP tests are minimal performance objectives. Local, state, and higher education curriculum specialists and teachers throughout Michigan have developed and refined objectives in reading (communication skills), mathematics, and other subject areas covered by MEAP tests. The important basic skills are given in the form of these performance objectives.

The State Board of Education has approved performance objectives in Art, Communication Skills (Reading, Writing, and Speaking/Listening), Health, Life Role Competencies, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education, Science, and Social Studies. Copies of the performance objectives for any subject area are available, although quantities are limited.

• WHAT KIND OF TESTS DOES MEAP USE?

The MEAP tests are objective-referenced. Appropriate performance objectives are selected for testing. Each selected objective is measured by a set of three questions.

If the student answers at least two of the three questions correctly, then he or she is considered to have mastered the basic skill measured by these questions. Thus, the MEAP tests are designed to reveal whether or not students have learned the specific basic skills tested.

• WHAT SUBJECT AREAS OTHER THAN MATHEMATICS AND READING HAVE BEEN TESTED?

Each year, as resources permit, efforts are made to test one or two subject areas beyond mathematics and reading. A small sample of school districts are selected to participate in each "sample testing" effort. The following areas have been sample tested:

1974-75	Science
1975-76	Health
1976-77	Metrics, Music
1977-78	Art, Social Studies
1978-79	Mathematics, Reading
1979-80	Career Development, Health, Listening
1980-81	Life Role Competencies, Science
1981-82	Physical Education
1982-83	Life Role Competencies, Music, Writing

HOW ARE STUDENTS TESTED?

- **WHICH STUDENTS TAKE THE MEAP TESTS?**

  All fourth, seventh, and tenth grade students in public schools take the reading and mathematics tests. However, certain special education and non-English speaking students may be excluded from the testing.

- **WHY ARE ALL STUDENTS TESTED INSTEAD OF JUST A SAMPLE OF STUDENTS?**

  One of the main purposes of the test is to provide achievement information about each individual student. Certain kinds of sampling techniques could be used to obtain reasonably accurate information to answer the question "How are the state's students

doing as a group?" However, unless all students at a grade level are tested, there would be no answer to the question, "How is my fourth grade child doing?" or "How is each student in my class doing?" Thus, neither parents nor teachers would have specific information on the achievement needs of each individual student so that an appropriate instructional program could be developed.

• WHY ARE THE MEAP TESTS GIVEN IN THE FALL?

One of the primary uses of MEAP test results is for the identification of students who are having trouble with some of the basic skills tested. By testing early in the fall, the test results for each student are returned to the local school district usually by Thanksgiving time. Thus, there is still sufficient time left in the school year for the local school staff to help students learn the important skills that they missed.

• WHO DECIDES WHEN THE MEAP TESTS ARE GIVEN?

The MEAP staff identify a four week span of time early in the fall when the tests must be given. This four week time span typically begins on the Monday following Labor Day. The first three weeks of the time span is intended for the initial testing. The fourth week is intended for make-up testing.

Following the procedures recommended by the MEAP staff, the testing should take no more than one hour per day for three or four days. Each local district decides when in the four week time span they will give the tests to their students. Special testing arrangements are made if the opening of school is delayed for any significant amount of time.

HOW CAN THE RESULTS BE USED?

• DOES THE MEAP HELP PARENTS?

Yes. Parents are encouraged to discuss the MEAP tests results with teachers and/or counselors to gain a better understanding of their child's strengths and weaknesses in the basic skills areas. The teacher, parent, and child then can cooperatively plan needed learning experiences.

A report of the MEAP results is provided for parents of each student tested. School districts are encouraged to share these results with parents.

• DOES THE MEAP HELP TEACHERS?

Yes. The individual student results help the teacher to determine which specific skills a student does or does not have so that appropriate instruction can be planned.

Classroom level reports help teachers detect patterns in the performance of their students as a group, as well as, for the individual student. Resource materials to help teachers understand and use the test results are available upon request from MEAP.

- **DOES MEAP HELP DISTRICT AND STATE EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS?**

  Yes. MEAP provides local education administrators with information that is useful for identifying certain strengths and weaknesses in curricula and programs and for helping determine priorities. Resource materials to help local district staffs use and report MEAP test results are available on request from MEAP.

  MEAP provides state education administrators with information about educational achievement and needs throughout Michigan. For instance, buildings with concentrations of students not achieving the basic skills have been identified for compensatory education funding using assessment results.

- **DO MEAP RESULTS MEASURE THE QUALITY OF A SCHOOL'S OR DISTRICT'S PROGRAM?**

  No. The MEAP tests measure only a set of very important basic skills in reading and mathematics. Although these skills are important, they are not the only skills which students should learn. The statewide MEAP does not provide information about student performance in other subject areas for all schools, nor does it provide direct information about attainment of more difficult or complex skills in reading and mathematics.

  By themselves, the MEAP test results cannot tell whether a district is providing an excellent instructional program to students with great educational needs or a mediocre program to students with few educational needs. Thus, comparing school districts on the basis of MEAP test results is very misleading and is not appropriate.

- **DOES THE MEAP DETERMINE THE CURRICULUM IN SCHOOLS?**

No. It is not the intention of the State Board of Education to control local districts' curricula through the MEAP tests; however, the performance objectives are considered to be basic to the education of all Michigan students. The performance objectives are minimal and experience has shown that the vast majority of local districts consider these basic skills to be important.

- **DO MEAP RESULTS REFLECT A STUDENT'S GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AND ACADEMIC ABILITIES?**

No. The statewide MEAP tests measure minimal performance objectives in reading and mathematics. Thus, they cover only some of the important skills which students should possess. Some students will know considerably more than is measured by the MEAP tests.

- **ARE EACH DISTRICT'S MEAP RESULTS AVAILABLE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC?**

Yes. Each district receives its own students' results and summary reports for each school and the district. Districts are encouraged to provide school and district results to the community and to share individual student results with parents.

School and district level results are public records and must be released, if requested, under Michigan law. Individual student records are not public records, thus, they may not be released to unauthorized individuals by requirement of Federal law.

Interested persons may request a school's or district's results from the Department of Education. In addition, a public report which summarizes the achievement for the whole state is available each year from the Department.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE

MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

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